Vivekananda's Views on Christianity and Islam

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Vivekananda was the Hindu revivalist of nineteenth century who preached the message of equality of all religions. In his lectures, he guided people to assimilation of religions and not their destruction. He emphasized on peace and harmony of religions that could only be attained through tolerance. [1] This paper explores his claim of equality of religions from his writings regarding two religions - Christianity and Islam. Critical approach is utilized to identify the fact that either he is equating all religions or he is trying to submerge the non-Hindu religions in his philosophy of neo-Vedanta. Apparently, the tension between these two positions makes his theory of pluralism suspicious. In other words, his popular image of being a pioneer of religious pluralism needs to be reassesses by studying his writings and presentation of the beliefs, rituals, and practices of other religions, as well as, his practical interactions with the followers of different religions during his life. In this connection, it is important to explore how he perceives and depicts the personalities of Jesus Christ and Muhammad ﷺ.

Christianity

In *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, a detailed account of Christ is present, which comprises of Christian doctrine, the personality of Jesus Christ, Christians as a nation of Christ, missionary activities of the Christian religion and criticism of the Christians in the context of western civilization. Before coming to the Christian doctrine, the focus in this paper will be on how he perceives Christianity as a religion.

He thinks that Christianity as a religion is younger in chronological order than Hinduism. So, he judges that

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Christianity is nothing else than the inconsistent imitation of the old Hinduism. But what does he mean by inconsistent imitation of Hinduism? The meaning of inconsistent imitation becomes clear when he equates this imitation with "a collection of little bits of Indian thought"[2] in Christian religion. He supplements his claim by pointing out that Jesus message utilized the Vedanta that comes from the forest of India (through experiences of Hindu monks), and it belong to Indian soil.[3]

He spots out reconciliatory approach of *Advaita* and *Dvaita* Vedanta in Jesus teachings when Jesus describes the relationship of God and his devotees.[4] He opines that to the masses who cannot conceive anything higher than a personal God, he [Jesus] said, "Pray to your father in heaven."[5] To others who could comprehend a higher idea, he told them, "I am the vine, ye are the branches,"[6] but he disclosed himself more fully to his disciples by revealing to them that "I and my Father are one."[7] In his above-mentioned claim, Vivekananda tries to categorize Christian concept of God according to his evolutionary scheme of Vedanta. Let us now examine how these teachings of Christ appear in the Christian faith.

In Christian doctrine, the Godhead is one in its essence or substance but consists of three persons; God as Father, God as son and God as Holy Spirit. The acceptance of this doctrine is the condition of salvation in Christianity and this doctrine is fabricated with other Christian doctrines like man is by birth sinner and Son of God has relieved man from this sinful nature. Essence of the Godhead is shared by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but not by human beings. In the same way, Hindu Vedanta and Christian Godhead has distinct purposes as Vedanta aims to help people to return to *Brahman* while Christian Godhead revolves around redemption of mankind through the blood of Son of God (Jesus).[8] Therefore, Vivekananda's claim about Christianity as the imitation of old Hinduism can not be accepted in a Christian context because his claim reveals

that he is trying to befit Hinduism in Christianity in a way that enables him to reject the basic doctrines of Christianity.

His rejection of Christian doctrine becomes immanent firstly when he explains incarnation of Jesus through the Hindu concept of *avatar*, the manifestation of Divine in different forms. He understands Jesus in the Hindu context according to which Jesus becomes just one of the multiple divine manifestations of God in this world. In his writings, he construes the personalities of Jesus and Buddha as many other divine manifestations and negates the Christian's claim of uniqueness of Christ as Son of God. He emphasizes that acceptance of any one of *avatars*, like Jesus, as a unique and complete manifestation of God will limit God, which is against the very basic nature of God's infinity.[9]

He also negates basic constitutional principle of Christianity that man is by nature sinner. This doctrinal rejection can be seen in his assertion that "Hindu refuses to call you sinners."[10] He not only rejects this Christian doctrine but also reinterprets it in accordance with *Advaita* Vedanta by emphasizing the Christian notion of God as Father. He said that "Ye are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth."[11] After developing the rational link of purity between Father and children (Christians) his explanation leaves no space for doctrine of sin. Such incorporation facility-tes him to pass his concluding remarks on this Christian belief as "it is a sin to call a man so; it's a standing libel on human nature Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are soul's [*sic*] immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal."[12] He also denies the crucifixion of Christ. Otherwise, he has to make compromise on Hindu beliefs of *avatar*. He bears this view by referring to the Qur'ān that crucified one was not Christ, rather it was his semblance.[13] Instead of refusing the death of Christ, he accepts the resurrection of Christ to support Hindu belief of reincarnation.[14]

He was not satisfied with Christian's salvation through the blood of Christ. He remarks that deliverance through the blood of Christ appears to him quite repulsive.[15] The reason of revulsion is embedded in his Hindu frame of mind. He, being a Hindu considers the salvation of any man through Jesus blood or cleansing of men's sins with a blood of Christ quite abhorrent. He was glad that such doctrine did not exist in India. This thinking is evident from his another claims according to which he would prefer to choose hell if he is given the options of being saved by the blood of Christ or dwelling in hell.[16]

After evaluating the Christian doctrines, he directs his attention to the personality of Jesus Christ. His first approach through which he looks at the character of Christ is *Advaita* Vedanta, *that* is in the light of Hindu philosophy and mysticism.[17] This approach encourages him to interpret Christ as incorporeal, boundless and liberated soul. He opines that human beings, as children of God, inherit this spirit and due to the immortal spirit of human beings the kingdom of God resides within them (*Advaita* Vedanta). He further adjusts Jesus in *Advaita* Vedanta as a personal God (*Ishvara*) while he explains Father as impersonal God.[18] In doing so he ignores that in Christianity, God as Father is distinct from God as Son, but in Hinduism, personal God (Ishvara) as *saguna Brahman* represents the same *nirguna Brahman* (Impersonal God). Consequently, it appears that he accepts character of Jesus that can easily be fitted to *Advaita* Vedanta frame, but rejects the character of Christ Jesus as the Self-revelation of the Supreme Spirit, because the acceptance of this point will challenge the impersonal infinite and meta-physical God of *Advaita* Vedanta to the physical and the limited personification of Jesus.[19] He also doubted the historical character of Jesus of Nazareth.[20] It is clear from the above discussion that he accepts the Hindu Christ and negates the character of Jesus Christ which the Christian doctrines present; in fact, his views can be considered to be in complete contrast

and contradiction to the Christian theology. He said "I pity the Hindu who does not see the beauty in Jesus Christ Character. I pity the Christian who does not reverence the Hindu Christ."[21]

The second approach that Vivekananda utilizes is the historical skeptical theory of the late nineteen Century that viewed Christ as a mythical figure.[22] This seems to be the reason that his writings lack the systematic outline of the life of the Jesus Christ due to his doubts about the historical character of Jesus Christ.[23] He admitted that he was inclined to think that Jesus never existed. He, later on, claimed that he never doubted historical figure of Christ. His belief in Jesus as a historical figure can be traced from his vision in which he saw an old and bearded man. That man was pointed towards a place Crete, an island, which Vivekananda believed, was the originating place of Christianity. He took this old man as Jesus and Crete as an island from where Christianity originated.[24] The effect of this dream on his mind cannot be denied regarding acceptance of the historical Jesus, but he never tried to offer his vision as evidence to others. Rather, he emphasized that being a Hindu the true idea was important for him; but its place of origin and time has been never worthy of concern.[25]

He perceived Christ as *Vedantist.* In such context, how did he perceive Christians? His reverence for Christ and Christianity after their adjustment in the Hindu frame is discernable, however, this is not the case with Christians. His criticism of Christians is often strong. The reason of this criticism can be categorized firstly, under his claim that Christ and his teachings are missing from the Christians' lives. That makes him to deny that Christians are the nation of Christ because Christ preached the message of renunciation of the worldly comforts while Christians of his time were living luxurious lives. Here he suggests Christians to follow Christ's teachings and says that living a life with Christ in rags is better than to live without him in palaces.[26]

It is questionable, however, to believe that the Christians do not follow many of the teachings of Christ; Is it Vivekananda's version of Christianity that he was talking about? To answer this question a critical analysis of his claim that Christ was absent from the lives of Christian of his times is needed. The very first problem that he points out relates to the missionary activities of Christians. He names Christian missionaries as 'antichrist' because they were not following the lifestyle of Christ. They were living married lives, unlike Christ and they had fair livelihood that which he also considered against the Christ's life. He considers that their missionary activities were contaminating the sacred character of Christ's teachings by shedding blood of the innocent for acquiring land; a practice that is utterly against Christ's teachings of ethics, peace, and tranquility. He also criticizes Christians in that they considered themselves as saviors the souls of others, but in this whole scheme, they forgot to save their own souls. He said that if you ask these Christian that what they are preaching they claimed that they are preaching the teaching of Christ. But if Christ's teachings were omitted from their preaching then there would remain nothing but the pointless polemical debates of the Christian missionaries in which they criticized Hindu religion.[27]

He accepts that Christ was a representative of the tolerant, the pluralistic concept of salvation when Christ asserts that he did not come to destroy the old law rather to complete it. However, he considers the missionary concept of salvation inconsistent with the real pluralist teachings of Christ. He rejects the missionary concept of salvation by comparing it with Hindu ideology of salvation. He highlights that in Hinduism salvation cannot be achieved by mere believing in some doctrine rather it is completely embedded in the completion of one's own duties.[28]

Vivekananda's criticism of the Christians generally and Christian missionaries, particularly seems exaggerated. Although the utilization of power and polemical debates and

contentious literature in missionary activities cannot be denied, his claim that Christians generally and missionaries particularly were antichrist cannot be accepted. The aim of the missionaries is to get converts and to establish the kingdom of the Christ. How can one reasonably call them antichrist? Then what was the reason of the Vivekananda criticism of these missionaries as the antichrist? It appears that he was able to appropriate Jesus as one of the incarnation of God among many manifestations in line with the Hindu view of *avatars*. This line of thought assisted him to equate Christianity as the religion of Aryans. But the Christian missionary's concept of Jesus was different from his Hindu Christ due to this reason he condemns the missionaries as the antichrist. Similarly, missionary activities of converting Hindus to Christianity seem to be the major reason of his criticism of missionaries. Here it is also worth pointing out that he disliked Hindu mass conversion to Christianity but emphasized in the reconversion of converted Hindus (Christian) to Hinduism again.

Vivekananda was an apologetic Hindu towards the polemical debates of Christian missionaries about Hinduism and Hindu civilization. He describes the foundation of the Indian civilization on spirituality that manifests itself in Hindu art, literature, ethics, philosophy and religion. The goal of Indian civilization is embedded in spiritual transcendence which neither concentrates on the material nor mental progress.[29] While his approach towards Christian civilization seems to be hostile that makes him believe that the role of the Christian civilization is destructive. He further claims that he is unable to appreciate present Christianity and Christian civilization because Christ and his teachings are missing in the present Christian civilization.[30]

The question is why he then targeted western civilization with his criticism? Or what were his aims behind this critical comparison of Indian and western civilization? In the context of

nineteenth century Bengal, it was evident that for him Christianity and western civilization was no more than an open threat to Hinduism.[31] He describes Christianity as a threat in the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in the following words: "You train and educate and clothe and pay men to do what? You come over to my country to curse and abuse all my forefathers, my religion, and everything. They walk near a temple and say,'You idolaters, you will go to hell.'But they dare not do that to the Mohammedans of India; the sword would be out."[32]

He criticized Christianity and western civilization, not only as an apologetic Hindu, rather he tried to settle the scores with the Missionaries by adopting a critical approach regarding the Hindu response to the missionary criticism of Hindus as worshipers of blocks of stone (idols). He believes that Hindus ignored this criticism because they considered that the westerner who exceeded Indians in the physical sciences and construction of huge buildings were like children in the area of spirituality.[33]His denunciation of western civilization seems to be his attempt to invert the hierarchy that place western civilization at the upper rungs due to its advancement in the field of science and technology. He tries to attain his goal by shifting this western superiority by shifting the criteria of superiority from materialism to spirituality or religion.[34] This approach benefited him in two dimensions at the same time. Firstly, through this approach, he applauds the Indian civilization that, according to him, it revolves around the central concept of religion and immortality of the soul. Thus, the bond that unites Indian nation is neither race nor language rather it is Vedanta.[35] Secondly, his abhorrent attitude can be noticed for western civilization in its pursuit of materialism. He accused this materialism as the core cause of immatureness of western civilization in metaphysical and spiritual experience.[36] Vivekananda described this aspect of western civilization in his *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in the following words:

A man may be wonderfully learned in the Western sense, yet he may not know the A B C of religion. I would tell him that. I would ask him, 'Can you think of spirit as such? Are you advanced in the science of the soul? Have you manifested your own soul above matter?' If he has not, then I say to him, 'Religion has not come to you; it is all talk and book and vanity.[37]

He equates this material progress of the west in materialism as the process of devolution. This devolution, according to him, is embedded in the westerner's behaviors of selfishness, intolerance, secularization that promoted not only the independent image of women but also indecent treatment of female. He points out this selfishness and devolution in his writing that "everything that has selfishness for its basis, competition as its right hand, and enjoyment as its goal, must die sooner or later. Such things must die. Let me tell you, brethren, if you want to live, if you really want your nation to live, go back to Christ."[38]

He highlights that the westerners who considered the criticism of every religion and civilization their birth right when came under criticism then their intolerance became evident. They claimed that "Don't touch us; we are Americans. We criticize [*sic*] all the people in the world, curse them and abuse them, say anything; but do not touch us; we are sensitive plants." [39] After pointing out the malpractices in western civilization, Vivekananda also proposed the possible solutions as the synthesis of higher spiritual values of India and western scientific accomplishments.[40] In short, he sees the perfection of the culture and civilization in Vedanta.[41]

The above-mentioned description of western civilization and Christianity needs some analysis.Firstly, it is important to notice that while criticizing western civilization and during appreciation of the Indian civilization, he seems to ignore the difference between religion and civilization. Western civilization portrayed

by him appeared to be completely devoid of religion, spiritu-ality and ethical values. This cannot be accepted as for granted for two following reasons. Firstly, it is not clear that during the above criticism either he was unaware of the mystical aspect of Christianity or he was ignoring the ethical and moral aspect of Christianity or he was aggravating the image of western civilization. No doubt the secular, rational and material trends of the western civilization of his age could not be ignored. But at the same time it is also not acceptable that all the Christians left Christ's teachings or all Christians became secular and materialist by ignoring the ethical and moral codes of Christia-nity. Secondly, his suggested cure of the western civilization in Vedanta might not be acceptable for Westerns and Christians. His emphasis on Vedanta as the only way to attain spiritual and blissful life reveals that he was not ready to accept the individuality of Christian religion and its spirituality. Therefore, it can be said that in the light of the above discussion Vivekan-anda's treatment of Christianity, Christ, Christian doctrine and western civilization were influenced by his exclusivist, and sometimes inclusivist, Hindu approach. He was ready to accept only those aspects of Jesus, the Christian faith and western civilization that could be adjusted and reinterpreted in the Hindu frame. And he not only rejected that doctrine that seems to be different from Vedanta, but also suggested to change such doctrines in line with Vedanta. After dealing Buddhism and Christianity, let us explore the image of Islam in his writings.

4.3- Islam

In the writings of Vivekananda, Islam appeared as an outsider or a foreign religion that is in complete contrast to Hinduism in its beliefs, doctrines and rituals. He describes the contested nature of these two religions by emphasizing that when funda-mental doctrines of Hinduism are evaluated in an Islamic context, these (Hindus doctrines) appear as grave sins. And similarly the fundamental doctrines of Islam lose their sacred-

ness in Hinduism.[42] He opines that this is the reason that Islam and Hinduism maintain their distinct metaphysical and cultural schemes that are non-overlapping and also incompatible with each other. He also highlights that Muslim society is based on monotheism and the caste-less idea of Islam; consequently it poses challenges to Hinduism. This might be the reason that he adopted an approach to acquit Hinduism from Islamic doctrinal criticism of idol worship and caste discrimination. At the same time he employs unconstructive attitude towards Islam, Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ and the Muslims.[43]

In comparison to Christianity and Buddhism, his discourses provide less information about Islam. In all volumes of Complete *Works of Swami Vivekananda, one* could find only one complete chapter"Mohammed" but he did not devote any complete chapter to deal with Islamic doctrines or Islamic civilization as he did in the case of Christianity and Buddhism. Rather, one could find that Islam covers the least part of his work that could be searched in his discourses, and in scattered form. He introduces Islam as a monotheistic religion that revolves around the concept of one God, having no companion to share His divinity. Muḥammad ﷺ is the prophet of God. He opines that Islam is easy to comprehend as it has no philosophy, priesthood or complicated ethical code. He believes that the practicality of Islam is hidden in his message of equality of all races and colors that helps Islam to develop a social system of brotherhood, equality, and justice.[44] He further adds that Islamic identity as a nation is hidden in the open-heartedness of the Muslims that enable them to embrace converted brothers without making any distinction. Even the Sultan of the Turks would be delighted to dine with the newly converted American Indians.[45]

The above mentioned views of Vivekananda constitute very little portion of his *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda,* while the remaining portion is dominated by his negation of Islamic doctrines and its notion of equality of races. He consi-

ders Islamic doctrines as a collection of contradictions that enables him to develop an argument that Islam theoretically denounces the Hindu rituals of idol worshiping. But in Islam the image worship is prevailing in the form of the *Kabah*, to which they prostrate five times a day and in kissing of black stone during their pilgrimage. He also points out the Muslim social practices of veneration of the saints and *pīrs* which appeared as parallel to idol worship.[46] He questions the authenticity of Islamic universal brotherhood because for him it's nothing more than covert duplicity. He negates the universal brotherhood of Islam by objecting that the nature of Islamic universal brotherhood does not allow the entrance of non-Muslims in it rather it preferred the cutting of throats of non-Muslims.[47] Vivekananda said that "Mohammadans talk of universal brotherhood, but what comes out of reality? Why anybody who is not a Mohammadan will not be admitted into this broth-erhood; he will more likely have his throat cut."[48] He stren-gthens his refusal of Islamic brotherhood by pointing out the opposition and antagonism within Islamic sects of *Shiah* and *Sunnis,* negates Islam being a non-sectarian religion. But what was the factor that compelled him to take such stance on Islam? Or what were the objectives of Vivekananda behind such criticism of the Islamic doctrines of monotheism and Islamic brotherhood? The main factor that annoyed him was the mass conversion of lower Hindu classes, which were highly mistreated in the society because of their cast, to Islam by escaping from Hindu caste discrimination. For curbing this conversion, he criticizes Islam to convince his Hindu fellows that this conversion to Islam would not relieve them from sectarian and caste hierarchy. Though, he admitted the weakness of Hinduism and also the threats that were challenging its survival among those religions who were the flag holders of human equality (Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity). And that might be the reason that makes him

undertake the task of reforming Hindu society in term of *neo-Vedantic* equality of all Hindus.[49]

Vivekananda in his whole discourse, not only tries to conceal the aggressive behavior of high caste Hindu, but also the weakness of Hindu society to integrate its unity. He also blames Islam as a religion that embraced non-Muslims into the fold of Islam through the sword. Vivekananda wrote that "Islam made its progress with sword and Quran in hand. Only two options they offered- accept Islam or die. Their tyranny helped them move forward, not their valor."[50] This is against the writing of many of the Muslim theologians and historians who consider the selfless preaching and the word of saints to be the reason for the spread of Islam. The error in Vivekananda's claim can also be seen from the fact that non-Muslims continued to live peacefully in Muslims lands when Muslims had full opportunity to convert them by sword. In fact, the jews enjoyed a golden time under the Islamic Spain. Despite 800 years of rule in India, the Hindus, like him, still existed when their forefathers could easily be converted to Islam by sword; but Muslim did not choose to do so.

He criticized Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, but in comparing the degree of criticisms of the three religions (Buddhism, Christianity and Islam) it reveals that he accepts Buddhism as the complementary part of Hinduism. He rejects Christian doctrines, rituals, missionary activities and western civilization, though he treats Christ as pure spirit. While in case of Islam, he not only criticizes Islam, Islamic doctrines, ritual, proselytization but he adopts the approach of apathy and bluntness for Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ that has not been seen in case of other religious leaders (Buddha and Christ).[51]

His introduction of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ appears quite objectionable for his followers as he describes him as a young man that had no care for religion rather he was inclined towards money. This contradicts the fact that he was offered wealth and

riches for leaving his mission; he rejected these offers as he did not want these things. Vivekananda, after mentioning his inclination towards money, mentions his first marriage with a rich widow. He then leaps to that phase of Muhammad's life when Muslims conquered Persia and Rome. Here he calls Muḥammad as an emperor while in reality Muḥammad neither uses this title nor did he passed a life of an emperor. He mentions the number of wives in his custody.[52] This was the status of Vivekananda's biased style of commenting on the topic "Muhammad". Though he did not depict Muḥammad ﷺ completely in the negative sense, but it cannot be taken as a positive, unbiased and authentic outlook. Likewise, he describes the arrival of Gabriel to Muḥammad ﷺ in terms of "dreams and vision" but not revelation. He further adds that Muḥammad did great preparation in the form of praying day and night that enabled him to receive Gabriel in dream. It is worth mentioning here that in his whole sketching, he was trying to give the impression that the rigorous prayers of Muḥammad made Muhammad's soul to receive messages, but in case of other religious teachers, he described them as great souls from their birth. Therefore in such a comparative frame, he did not categorize Muḥammad with great souls like Buddha, Christ and Krishna, but he also placed Muḥammad at the lowest niche.[53]

His partiality towards Muḥammad could be noticed when he considers the ascension of the Muḥammad ﷺ to heaven as nothing more than superstition. He writes that Muḥammad ﷺ was "inspired, no doubt, but that inspiration was, as it were, stumbled upon. He [Muhammad] was not a trained *yogi*, and did not know the reason of what he was doing."[54] He was not ready to accept Muḥammad as a mature *yogi* while he called Buddha a living Vedanta and Christ the *Vedantist*. Such discriminating attitude of Vivekananda regarding Muḥammad demands exploring reasons for such a treatment of Muhammad?

The very first reason that could be the reason for Vivekananda's unfriendly attitude towards Muḥammad appears in his writings when he wrote that "Muhammad's heart was sick at the sin, idolatry and mock worship, superstitious and human sacrifices, and so on."[55] These views, which are completely baseless, cannot be proved by any historical sources; it can only come from the one who rejects history and presents his thoughts without any evidence backing. The second reason could be seen in his assertion that the level of intensity of Muslim's hatred towards Hinduism is much higher when compared with Jews and Christians. He further adds that these Muslims named us *Kāfir* because we worshiped idols and these Muslims think that we (Hindu) deserve slaughtering from their hand. Vivekananda said that it is stated in Qur'ān "Kill the infidels if they do not become Muslims." Like most non-Muslims, he has either willfully taken this verse out of context (i.e. the battle in which it was revealed) or is completely ignorant of the Islamic text. He blames Muḥammad for such intolerant attitude towards the Hindus. Vivekananda says that:

> Muhammad's teachings include two-pronged strategy. He told Muslims that killing non-Muslims is an act of mercy towards them, as well as a real service to Allah. And therefore, Allah has promised to such men direct entry to heaven and every type of sense pleasure that they may seek with beautiful women who are not affected by the aging process and pregnancy. This belief has driven Muslims into killing numerous non-Muslims.[56]

This view, like his other views, lack evidence as well. From the conduct of Prophet ﷺ, we see thousands of examples where he showed that he is not only a mercy for Muslims, but also for non-Muslims. If the above-mentioned view (killing the non-Muslims) was true than why do we not see this happening when the Islamic state of Madinah was established? Why was he inclined to forgive the non-Muslims when they attached him?

Why did he forgive the non-believers when they were captured and presentedin front of him after they attached the innocent Muslims going for the pilgrimage before the conquest of Makkah? Why did he announce general forgiveness after the conquest of Makkah when he could easily kill the non-believers? Why did he not choose to crush the people of Taif when angel Gabriel offered him to do so after they attacked him and his sacred blood was spilled? In summary, Vivekananda's views are completely ignorant of the historical facts and based merely on his whims and inauthentic intention. Vivekananda could not differentiate between the Islamic injunctions that are present in Qur'ān and role of Muḥammad ﷺ as a Prophet and preacher. His discourses give the impression that Muḥammad ﷺ is the sole authority of deciding the fate of infidels and in doing so he ignores the Islamic principle that Allah Almighty is the supreme authority while Muḥammad ﷺ only preached the message given by Allah. His conception of Muhammad's ﷺ authority could be seen in his assertion that "ignorant persons …..dare to say that others are entirely wrong, and they alone are right. If they are opposed, they begin to fight. They say they will fight with any man who does not believe as they believed and as Mohammad did."[57]

He considers Muḥammad ﷺ responsible for installing intolerant and barbaric nomenclature to his nation (Muslims). He claims that the teachings of Muḥammad ﷺ, due to their narrow-mindedness, brought forth an arrogant nation, because they [Muslims] believe that there is one God, Muḥammad is His messenger and that those things which are in a clash with Islam are not only bad but should be destroyed. He defines Mohammedanism thus:

> There is one God and Mohammad is His Prophet. Everything beyond that, not only is bad, but must be destroyed forthwith; at a moment's notice, every man and woman who does not belong to this worship must

be immediately broken; every book that teaches anything else must be burnt From the Pacific to Atlantic, for five hundred years blood ran all over the World. This is Mohammedanism.[58]

From the above-mentioned discussion, it could be said that his unsympathetic and biased treatment of Islam and Christianity is pointing towards the insecure survival of Hinduism among the religions such as Islam and Chritianity. Both these religions reject polytheistic idol worshiping and caste-based system. He seems to not only want the curbing of the tides of Islam but also his aim was to stop the Islamic proselytization. For achieving his desired ends, Vivekananda proposed a solution of combining Hindu-Muslim frameworks that "for our motherland, a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam-Vedanta brain and Islam body - is the only hope. I see in my mind's eye the future perfect India rising out of this chaos and strife, glorious and invincible, with the Vedanta brain and Islam body,"[59]

Here brain signifies the governing organ that controls the whole body by instructions that provide set pattern of thought. In this context, he prefers Hindu philosophy as superior religious instruction that would be utilized to control the Islamic body that symbolizes the central unifying force of equality and brotherhood that not only maintain the identity of Muslims as a nation but also keep them intact without discriminating them into superior and inferior. Thus Vivekananda seems to point towards the abolition of the caste hierarchy in Hinduism. But in actual sense does he really want to abolish caste system of Hinduism? Critical examination of his dealing with the caste system reveals that he was not in favor of abolition of caste system; rather he was insisting on caste mobility.[60] Vivekananda considered this adjustment of caste mobility compulsory for the survival of Hinduism among those religions (Christianity and Islam) who preached the message of equality of all races.

Conclusion

From the above, it can be concluded that Vivekananda's image as a religious pluralists cannot be justified in the light of his writings considering his polemical and biased approach towards Christianity and Islam. His 'cherry-picking' approach, i.e. picking from the texts what he likes and leaving aside what does not agree with his opinion, is very evident from his approach. At times, he goes in complete contradiction to the historical facts, even in the absence of any authentic counter evidence. This makes his views regarding Christ and Prophet Muhammad ﷺ highly objectionable and untrustworthy. He not only denied the individuality of these two religions but also tried to place these religions on the lower rungs of Vedantic philosophy.

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